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WOMEN OF VALOR IN THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

by

Cheryl A. Heimerman, Lt Col, USAF

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Advisor: Dr. Howard M. Hensel

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Preface

Much has been written about the American Civil War but comparatively little can be found about the role that women played serving their cause, either Confederate or Union. My research took me to a different world where women did not yet vote and were not considered capable of making a decision. What I discovered were fascinating stories about women that risked their lives as nurses, soldiers and spies. Names like Clara Barton, Rosetta Wakeman, Elizabeth Walker and Belle Boyd are just a few of many ladies with stories of patriotism, courage and devotion to duty during the Civil War.

My interest in even pursuing this subject can be attributed to Dr. Howard Hensel. He brought history alive for me. His lectures are like a novel, complete with vignettes on the characters' personalities and idiosyncracies that bring life to the events that shaped history. My sincere gratitude to him for kindling the flame of curiosity to learn more.

My sincere appreciation to Senior Airman Angela Perry and Ms Janet Fecteau for providing incredible administrative support. They made the insertion of graphics look easy but I can assure you, for many of us, it is not. I couldn't have finished this paper without them.

I hope you find the stories of these women as intriguing as I did. And if you're like me, share it with others. They are truly women of valor.

Abstract

The role of women in the Civil War has often been overlooked in history. Women's roles prior to the Civil War were primarily confined to the home and family. Single women or those who were financially challenged could find work outside the home but opportunities were limited. At the outset of the war, more women were forced into working in factories or for the government, not only to support the war effort but also to provide for the family when the husband was at war. Many women who stayed home also became the nucleus for the formation of ladies aids societies, gathering supplies and raising funds for the soldiers.

Other women chose a more direct involvement in the war. These women, including daughters of the regiment, *vivangieres*, militia members, spies, saboteurs, soldiers, nurses and doctors, proved that women could be aggressive, resourceful and patriotic. While little has been written about their contributions, in recent years more research has brought their stories to the forefront. By selecting a representative sampling of women in each category, a better understanding of women's changing roles was revealed.

Since many of the roles of women during the Civil War were a departure from those considered traditional at the time, it is important to consider how these changing roles impacted life for women after the war ended. History shows both positive and negative impacts in areas such as careers and education, however, virtually no progress was made for the role of women in the military.

Many women served with valor during the Civil War and their contributions were to have a lasting impact on the lives of women in the future.

Chapter 1

Pre-Civil War Life

We are not enemies, but friends.... Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection.

—Abraham Lincoln

The American Civil War had a profound effect on the lives of most Americans. While much of the destruction of the land and people's property was within the Confederate States, virtually no family was left untouched in the loss of lives of loved ones. Lives changed for more than the men who went off to fight for the cause of the Federals or the Confederates. Women's lives were dramatically changed as well, as women took on new roles to support the war effort, not only at home, but on the battlefield too. It's the lives of the women who took to the battlefield as nurses, soldiers, spies and saboteurs that were truly revolutionary.

Women's Life before the Civil War

To appreciate the significance of their decision to contribute to the war effort away from home, it is important to understand how women lived before the war began. During the thirty years preceding the Civil War the nation experienced more than physical growth and expansion. There was also economic diversification, democratic advancement, intellectual progress and sectional hostility.¹ Men moved into jobs in factories and offices. But how did these changes affect the women? In spite of these

changes, a woman's world was still focused on the home and family. Her role was to bear and nurture children and to make the home a haven to which the husband returned from work each day to find love and warmth at the hearth. To the extent that this "cult of domesticity" removed women from the "real world" and confined them to an inferior sphere, was a setback to any quest for equal rights and status.² Most women readily conceded authority to men: first to their father then to a husband or in the case of widows and spinsters, to another male relative.³

The economic transformation in the mid-19th century did change the quality of family life as historians note the simultaneous decline of the birth rate and the rise of education in the nineteenth century. Women played a crucial role in these developments and derived significant benefits from them. Middle-class marriages became more of an equal partnership than ever before. In some respects women attained a superior position in the partnership. If men ruled outside the home, women tended to rule within it. The decision to have fewer children was a mutual one but probably most often initiated by women. Fewer children meant that middle-class women in 1850 were less continuously burdened by pregnancy, childbirth and nursing than their mothers and grandmothers had been. This not only enabled them to give each child more affection; it also freed them for activities outside the home, specifically religion and education.⁴

Women had long constituted a majority of church members; during the Second Great Awakening they increased their prevalence in that realm. This evangelical revival also produced a "benevolent empire" of Bible societies, moral reform organizations and social uplift associations of all kinds—most notably the temperance and abolitionist movements. Women were active in all of these efforts, first in separate female societies

but increasingly in “mixed” associations after women abolitionists made this breakthrough in the 1830s.⁵

Women’s advances in education were impressive. By 1850, girls went to elementary school and achieved literacy in virtually the same proportions as boys—the only country where that was yet true. Higher education was still a male domain, but several female “seminaries” for advanced secondary schooling were founded during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. By 1850, nearly three-quarters of the public school teachers in Massachusetts were women.⁶ Another education profession was opening to women during this era—writing for publication. The new emphasis on home and family created a huge audience for articles and books on homemaking, child-rearing, cooking and related subjects. Women’s magazines proliferated to meet the need. A paying profession arose for female writers.⁷

Some women did work outside the home, usually out of necessity. While women’s experience was obviously in the home, most of them shunned domestic service in favor of positions in the rapidly expanding industry. By 1860 more than 270,000 females were employed in the textile, shoe, clothing, printing and publishing establishments. Incredibly, 135,000 worked in the New England factories and composed 65 percent of the region’s industrial labor.⁸ One-fourth of the employees in manufacturing were women, while in the textile industry women and girls constituted nearly two-thirds of the wage workers.⁹ Southern women had less job opportunities than Northern women because of the emphasis on agriculture and public opinion that frowned on women working outside the home. Therefore, only 12,000 women worked in factories in the eleven Confederate states, which was only 10 percent of the area’s industrial wage earners.¹⁰ Nevertheless, only 25 percent of all white women worked outside the home

before marriage and fewer than 5 percent did so while married. Many young single women were part of the labor force for only two or three years while they built a dowry for marriage.¹¹ Dressmaking and millinery were two business opportunities that were acceptable occupations for women of the time. They also managed hotels, boardinghouses and saloons.¹² Other married women worked out of their homes, often as seamstresses. Still the middle-class ideal was home and motherhood.

One important issue concerning women in the workplace would continue into the war: wages. Women were not paid an equal wage comparable work. As Mary Massey points out in her book, *Women of the Civil War*, “it was primarily because women were willing to work longer hours for less pay that they were able to take over men’s jobs, and their protests seldom improved their situation.”¹³ Inevitably, women who could write or speak or teach or edit magazines began to ask why they should not be paid as much as men for these services and why they could not also preach, practice law or medicine or hold property independently of their husbands—and something else—vote.¹⁴

This was the life of women when the fall of Fort Sumter marked the beginning of the four-year struggle called the American Civil War. In many ways, their lives and those of future generations would never be the same.

Notes

¹ Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Women in the Civil War*. (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 1.

² James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 34.

³ Massey, 4.

⁴ McPherson, 34-35.

⁵ McPherson, 35.

⁶ McPherson, 35-36.

⁷ McPherson, 36.

⁸ Massey, 5.

⁹ McPherson, 33.

Notes

- ¹⁰ Massey, 5.
- ¹¹ McPherson, 33-34.
- ¹² Massey, 8.
- ¹³ Massey, 6.
- ¹⁴ McPherson, 36.

Chapter 2

Women Warriors

For I reason this out in my mind. There was one of two things I had a right to. Liberty or death. If I could not have one, I would have the other, for no man should take me alive. I should fight for my liberty as long as my strength lasted.

—Harriet Tubman

The Civil War is described by George Augustus Sala, a British journalist, as a “women’s war.” Emotions, energies and talents that they did not realize they possessed were unleashed, and he found the women from both the North and the South to be “the bitterest, most vengeful politicians, unanimous in their exasperation and implacability.”¹ Their contributions to the “war effort” were numerous and diverse from fund-raising to nursing, and from keeping the war machine supplied with weapons to gathering intelligence from the enemy. Their roles can be categorized as support from the home front or going to war with the men.

On the Home Front

Most women remained at home during the early part of the war; however, as the war moved into the Confederacy, many women were forced to leave their homes, some even living in caves. In addition their traditional duties, women who remained at home were actively involved in behind the front efforts to support the troops. Women from all

classes felt it was their patriotic duty to serve their country by supplying the troops, giving food, clothing, medical supplies and even money.² In response to the need to organize these efforts, ladies' aid societies were formed throughout the country. These organizations were well organized with officers, committees and written procedures that proved the seriousness and resourcefulness of these ladies. In the Confederacy, Soldiers' Friend Societies, Hospital Aid Societies and Soldiers' Relief Associations were in abundance. They were noted for their creativity in raising funds for needed supplies by planning bazaars, balls, auctions, theatricals, tableaux and concerts.³ Similar experiences befell their northern sisters who, already more emancipated when the war began, threw themselves into the fray with equal energy and in greater numbers. The principal vehicle for their activity was the United States Sanitary Commission.⁴ Within days of the firing on Sumter, thousands of aid societies were formed throughout the Union and once the Sanitary Commission was formed, they provided it with a steady stream of stores to fill its storehouses.⁵

Women were also compelled to work outside the home in greater numbers than ever before. Their employment encompassed a range of occupations from government civil service and army nursing to agricultural fieldwork and manufacturing. In agriculture, the increased use of farm machinery enabled women to fill much of the gap left by the enlistment of nearly a million northern farmers and farm laborers in the army. In northern industry women worked mainly in occupations where they were already prominent—textiles, clothing, shoemaking—but increased their proportion of the manufacturing labor force from one-fourth to one-third during the war. Unfortunately, because women continued to earn much less than men for the same or similar jobs, their

expanded proportion of the wartime labor force kept down the average of wage increases.⁶ For unskilled workers and women in particular, low wages and inflation remained a searing grievance. “We are unable to sustain life for the prices offered by contractors, who fatten on their contracts by grinding immense profits out of the labor of their operatives,” wrote a group of seamstresses—who in war as in peace were the most exploited group of workers—making army uniforms in 1864.⁷

On the Battlefield

Many women served in combat on both sides during the Civil War, some as officers or sergeants. Dr. L. P. Bracken wrote, “The number of women who actually bore arms in the war, or who, though generally attending a regiment as nurses and *vivandieres*, at times engaged in the actual conflict was much larger than is generally supposed, and embraces persons of all ranks of society.”⁸ Women had varying motives for placing their lives at risk: patriotism, independence, a sense of adventure and accompanying a loved one motivated women to enter the battlefield.

While it is hard to conceive of now, nurses in the 19th century were men. Women, however, were often skilled caregivers due to their experiences at home. In 1861, women took their home skills outside the home to care for the soldiers, however, the word “nurse” referred to a variety of people. At the time there were no nursing schools, no diplomas, no credentials. Nurses were “agents” of the Sanitary Commission, the Christian Commission, or a state Soldier’s Aid Commission. Or they could be women requested to work at hospitals by surgeons or a nun from the Sisters of Mercy or Sisters of Charity. Nurses were also officers’ wives who accompanied their husbands to the battlefields or women who cared for their wounded, sick or dying husbands or sons near

the field or in hospitals. In the broadest terms they were often laundresses or matrons attached to state regiments who took over nursing duties in between their housekeeping chores.⁹ White women volunteered by the hundreds as nurses while slaves were mobilized as orderlies and gravediggers.¹⁰

Other women on the battlefield we included *vivandieres*, or canteen women who supplied food and water to soldiers. “Daughters of the regiment” were intended to be a regiment’s inspiration, wearing colorful uniforms and serving an ornamental role by leading soldiers in parades as well as provide other non-combat support in battle. There were also cooks and laundresses, officers’ wives and sometimes camp followers (many times prostitutes) in camp.¹¹ Although these women were not soldiers, they often were in as much danger as the men during battle were.

Women who wanted to be soldiers had to dress up as men—it was a means to an end—so that they could strike a solid blow against the enemy, or gain a measure of economic, legal and social independence that was not available to them at the time.¹² Mary Livermore of the U.S. Sanitary Commission wrote in her memoirs that “the number of women soldiers known to the service... [is] little less than four hundred,” although she was convinced that “a large number of women disguised themselves and enlisted in the service” never to be discovered even in death.¹³ In the book, *History of Woman Suffrage*, the authors noted that “army regulations” were used as an excuse to deny recognition to women soldiers and many historians fail to acknowledge their services in the war, though

Hundreds of women marched steadily up to the mouth of a hundred cannon pouring out fire and smoke, shot and shell, mowing down the advancing hosts like grass; men, horses, and colors going down in confusion, disappearing in clouds of smoke; the only sound, the screaming of shells, the crackling of musketry, the thunder of artillery... through all

this women were sustained by the enthusiasm born of love of country and liberty.¹⁴

Some soldiers also served as spies for either the North or the South along with some civilian patriots who furthered the cause of their side. They often risked their lives and imprisonment to get the information through, and are credited for victories in battle.

It is the lives of these women—the ones on the battlefield that need to have their stories told. Since many fought in secrecy, we depend on diaries, letters and in some cases autobiographies to tell their story. It's a story worth telling.

Notes

¹ Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Women in the Civil War*. (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 25.

² Julieanna Williams, "The Homefront: For Our Boys – The Ladies' Aid Societies," In *Valor and Lace: The Roles of Confederate Women, 1861-1865*, ed. by Mauriel Phillips Joslyn. (Murfreesboro, Tenn.: Southern Heritage Press, 1996), 15.

³ Williams, 16-17.

⁴ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 480.

⁵ Margaret Leech, *Reveille in Washington, 1860-1965*. (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1994), 214.

⁶ McPherson, 448-449.

⁷ McPherson, 450.

⁸ Richard Hall, *Patriots in Disguise: Women Warriors of the Civil War*. (New York: Paragon House, 1993), xi.

⁹ Marilyn Mayer Culpepper, *Trials and Triumphs: Women of the American Civil War*. (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 1991), 320-321.

¹⁰ McPherson, 477.

¹¹ Hall, xiii.

¹² Sarah Rosetta Wakeman, *An Uncommon Soldier*, ed. by Lauren Cook Burgess. (Pasedena, MD.: The MINERVA Center, 1994), 2.

¹³ Wakeman, 2.

¹⁴ Wakeman, 2.

Chapter 3

Soldiers, Spies and Saboteurs

She risked everything that is dear to man—friends, fortune, comfort, health, life itself...

—Elizabeth Van Lew grave marker

Women were soldiers, whether they served as *vivandieres*, daughters of the regiment, spies or disguised as men because they were often faced with the same dangers as the men that were called soldiers. These women came from every social status, joined for various personal reasons and committed themselves for differing lengths of time just as the men but have received far less recognition for their service. This is their legacy to the Civil War.

The Half-Soldier Heroines

Marie Tebe. “French Mary,” like many women of the Civil War, joined her husband when he enlisted in the 27th Pennsylvania Infantry even before Fort Sumter was fired upon. Dressed in a blue Zouave jacket, short skirt trimmed with red braid over red trousers, boots and a sailor hat, Marie was a true *vivandiere*, selling goods to the soldiers, to include contraband whiskey. She also served as a cook, laundress, seamstress and nurse for the men and was said to have been under fire thirteen times. In Frank Rauscher’s memoir on the 114th Pennsylvania Infantry he wrote, “She was a courageous

women and often got within range of the enemy's fire whilst parting with the contents of her canteen among our wounded men. Her skirts were riddled with bullets during the battle of Chancellorsville."¹ Major General David B. Birney awarded her a medal for gallantry, but she would not wear it because "she did not want a present."²

At the battle of Fredericksburg, December 13, 1862, Marie and other soldiers of the 114th Infantry helped set up a field hospital to care for the wounded. And in spite of being wounded by a bullet in the left ankle, she cared for others.³

"French Mary" served the Union army until the end of the war when she was mustered out with the regiment on May 29, 1865.⁴



Marie Tebe

Figure 1.



Kady Brownell

Figure 2.

Kady Brownell. Like Marie, Kady joined the 1st Rhode Island to accompany her husband who was appointed as an orderly sergeant. A daughter of a Scotsman and soldier in the British army, this stern-faced girl with long, flowing hair, had a passion for

military life. She too wore a modified uniform, with a skirt covering the trousers to the knee, a sash with big curtain tassels, and a sword.⁵ “This daughter of the regiment was resolved not to be a mere water-carrier, nor an ornamental appendage,” wrote biographer Frank Moore. Kady took rifle practice with the men, becoming “one of the quickest and most accurate marksmen in the regiment.” The sword she wore with her uniform was not ornamental either; she practiced daily with her husband and friends until she was familiar with its uses.⁶ One story says it was because of her impressive display of martial arts that Kady was appointed color bearer but another more romantic tale is that during the battle of Bull Run, she rescued the banner from a fallen comrade.⁷

Regardless of how it transpired, in the battle of the 1st Bull Run, Kady proudly carried the flag and following military procedure, Moore wrote that

...she remained in the line, guarding the colors, and thus giving a definite point on which the men could rally, as the skirmish deepened into a general engagement. There she stood, unmoved and dauntless, under the withering heat, and amid the roar, and blood, and dust of that terrible July day. Shells went screaming over her with the howl of an avenging demon, and the air was thick and hot with deadly singing of the minie balls.⁸

She received a bullet wound for her valor and a poem for her gallantry.

Who with the soldiers was staunch danger-sharer—
Marched in the ranks through the shriek of the shell?
Who was their comrade, their brave color-bearer?
Who but the resolute Kady Brownell!⁹

After the regiment was discharged Kady and Robert reenlisted in the 5th Rhode Island Infantry, which was part of a force that in January 1862, took Roanoke Island, and two months later advanced on New Bern, North Carolina. Kady, now serving as a daughter of the regiment and nurse, marched with the regiment fourteen miles through the mud of the Neuse River.¹⁰ She was given permission to carry the colors up until the charge was ordered. Kady once again proved she was a hero.

While the regiments were moving into position, the 5th Rhode Island was seen by other units advancing through the woods from an unexpected direction, and were mistaken for a force of Confederates. Preparations were quickly made to open fire with both muskets and artillery. Seeing the danger, Kady promptly and courageously dashed to the front into open ground and waved the colors until the advancing regiment was recognized as friendly. Her action no doubt saved dozens of lives that could have been lost to a battlefield blunder.¹¹

Kady was tending the wounded at New Bern when she received word that Robert had fallen. She stayed by his side for a month at New Bern then accompanied him to New York where he recuperated for eighteen months, their soldiering days now over.¹²

Soldiers on the Home Front

While some women chose to accompany their loved ones into the fray, others made their contributions closer to home. While it is known that women in communities banded together to form militias to protect their community, little is written about them. One such organization, the Nancy Harts, is the exception. Other women worked alone to protect their home from advancing forces or thwart the enemy through sabotage or espionage. Many of these women remembered their war years as the most exciting of their lives because of the ever-present risk and the challenge of performing daring deeds for their cause.¹³

Militias

Customs and conventions of the day restricted women, particularly Southern women, from participation in the war effort except through ladies' aid societies. However, some middle- and upper class women took a more active role in the defense of their homeland by forming military companies. These "drill teams" were formed throughout the Confederacy, and "for the first time southern women found they could participate in male

activities without losing their right to be called a lady.”¹⁴ The North also formed such militias early in the war but they soon disappeared, possibly because there was no perceived threat to their home.

Using William J. Hardee’s *Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics* as a guide, the ladies learned to shoot, drill and march.¹⁵ They were often formed in girls’ schools across the Confederacy, such as the military company formed at the Wesleyan Female Institute in Macon, Georgia.¹⁶ But little is known about these groups, for after the war, the Southerners were interested in returning to the “old order” rather than “promote the notion that women had the right to engage in traditional male activities.”¹⁷

The “Nancy Harts.” Another militia that survived time was formed at the LaGrange Female Institute by two of its former students: Nancy Morgan and Mary Heard, both wives of Confederate officers. One of its members, Mrs. Leila C. Morris, recalled how, at age fourteen, she had joined the other women in LaGrange, Georgia, in forming the company. In a speech before United Daughters of the Confederacy at Atlanta in 1896, she said, “Thus was organized, I believe, the only woman’s company for regular military duty ever commissioned in the continent.”¹⁸ Other members of the “Nancy Harts” included friends and former classmates of Morgan and Heard as well as current students at the school.

They organized the military company because the ladies realized LaGrange was in a vulnerable location, halfway between Montgomery, Alabama, the early capital of the Confederacy, and Atlanta; and the Atlanta and West Point Railroad, which ran through the town, was a vital link in the Confederate supply routes. When Morgan and Heard made the decision to form the “Nancy Harts,” most of the able-bodied men, including

their husbands and brothers, had already left for the war. Although these women learned to drill and fire a musket, conventional wisdom required that they still “behave like ladies.”¹⁹

They also participated in the more traditional female duties of sewing, knitting and nursing. Many casualties poured into the town as the war went on, filling the town’s four main Confederate hospitals. Families took the overflow and as militia member Leila Pullen recalled, “Each young woman had one or more of the sick and wounded to care for. This meant [we had] to prepare suitable food and delicacies; to see that the necessary clothing, bandages and lint were always in readiness; to write their letters; to console and comfort them by reading to them from the Bible and to divert and amuse them by reading light li[t]erature.”²⁰

The “Nancy Harts” marched, drilled and continued target practice for four years, still united in the last month of the war when the Union soldiers approached the town. When the soldiers rode into the town that late Monday afternoon in April, the local citizens, including the militia-women met them, ready to defend their homes. Whether they would have used their weapons will never be known because, as one woman observed, “the officer in command of that detachment of invaders was a gentleman.” After being introduced to the commander of the “Nancy Harts,” Union Colonel Oscar LaGrange was said to have quipped, “I should think the Nancy Harts might use their eyes with better effect upon the Federal soldiers than their rusty guns.” The women “immediately abandoned military discipline and gave themselves over.”²¹ Mrs. Thaddeus Horton wrote in her article, “Nancy Harts,” for the *Ladies Home Journal* in 1904. “They did not fire

volleys nor execute military maneuvers,” she firmly stated, “but they used methods equally effective: they stood between their homes and destruction.”²²



Nancy Hill Morgan

Figure 3.



Mary Heard

Figure 4.

Saboteurs

While they did not take up arms to protect their homes, some ladies were willing to thwart enemies' advances in any way they knew how. In fact, Southern women were among the most successful saboteurs and when caught, were proud to admit it. The cost for their crime was often prison. **Mrs. Margaret Murphy** was sent to the Fitchburg House of Correction on November 23, 1863, for purchasing and then attempting to set a bridge on fire.²³ **Mrs. Hunter** and her daughter haughtily confessed to destroying several bridges in Tennessee to block the Federal advance and told their captors they would do it again if given the chance. They were banished into Confederate lines.²⁴ In 1864 **Sarah Jane Smith** was sentenced to be hanged after two years of smuggling and sabotage through Missouri. Beginning her exploits at age fourteen, one journalist described her as one of the “most aggravating” nuisances of the war. Among her more

grievous offenses was when she cut four miles of telegraph wires in the southeastern part of the state. General Rosecrans commuted her sentence to life imprisonment for the duration of the war.²⁵ Like Sarah Jane, **Katie Beattie** was a Confederate sympathizer from Missouri. She was charged with aiding prisoners' escape and burning Federal boats and warehouses. While highly esteemed by rebel generals, her escapades landed her and her landlady in prison.²⁶

Spies

In addition to saboteurs like the women described previously, another daring "profession" for women at home was espionage. "Anyone engaged in espionage did indeed stand to lose everything, for spies were not publicly identified by those they represented, and their eccentric, unconventional conduct often aroused suspicion, damaged their reputation, and made them a target for abuse and ridicule." explained Massey.²⁷ Some lesser known spies include Nettie Slator, Mrs. Baxley, Augusta Morris, Elizabeth Van Lew and Pauline Cushman, but the two women most written about in Civil War history are Belle Boyd and Rose Greenhow.

Rose O'Neal Greenhow. "Wild Rose" or "Rebel Rose" was a passionate secessionist and one of the most renowned spies in the Civil War.²⁸ Because of her birth in a wealthy family in Washington, D.C., in 1817, she became conversant with the Washington political society, which she effectively utilized to spy for the Confederacy. Rose also established a network of fifty spies, forty-eight of them women, covering the Confederacy from Texas to Washington.²⁹ It continued to operate even when Rose was imprisoned.

Rose had already established the groundwork for her spying career during the President Buchanan's administration. She knew everyone of official consequence and was regarded as a person of influence to whom people went for help in getting introductions and appointments. Margaret Leech, in her book, *Reveille in Washington*, described the extent of her contacts after the outbreak of hostilities.

She was not estranged from her friends among the Republican leaders. She still received Secretary Seward, and commented that she found him convivially loquacious after supper. Senator Wilson of Massachusetts was frequently a guest in her little house across from St John's church. That plebeian abolitionist had none of Mr. Seward's social grace, but he was a powerful figure in the Senate. He was chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs.³⁰

Described as a "charmingly mysterious woman," Rose could attract, repel, or frighten men as she chose and was adept at getting them to divulge secrets.³¹ In justifying her contacts with Republicans, she avowed, "To this end I employed every capacity with which God had endowed me and the result was far more successful than my hopes could have flattered me to expect."³²

In May, her friend, then Captain Thomas Jordan of the United States Army, but soon to be Colonel Jordan of the Confederacy, approached her, suggesting she transmit military information to the Confederate Army in code. Rose enthusiastically agreed. Before leaving Washington for his new position as adjutant general in General Beauregard's Confederate army, Jordan provided Rose with a cipher code.³³

General Beauregard received his first message from Rose around July 10, 1861, concerning the Federal advance. It was delivered by Rose's assistant, Bettie Duvall, tucked in her hair, in a package the size of a silver dollar and sewn up in black silk. Rose claimed she forwarded the map used by the Senate Committee on Military Affairs with red dotted lines showing the proposed route to Manassas.³⁴ During the evening of July

15, a man named Donellan secretly ferried across the Potomac bringing a coded message to Mrs. Greenhow from General Beauregard. She replied in the same cipher, "Order issued for McDowell to march upon Manassas tonight." After receipt of her message, the general ordered his outpost commanders to fall back before the enemy to already designated positions. He also sent a urgent telegram to Richmond, asking that General Joe Johnston's forces, located in the Valley, be permitted to join him. As a result, the Confederacy had not one, but two armies to confront the Federals at Manassas.³⁵

Following the Confederate victory at Bull Run, Rose was under immediate suspicion and her every move watched. She continued to supply the Confederates with information, such as "verbatim reports" of the Cabinet meetings, and the Republican caucuses, exact drawings of the Washington fortifications and the "minutes of McClellan's private consultations, and often extracts from his notes."³⁶ Major E. J. Allen, otherwise known as Allan Pinkerton, General McClellan's chief detective in the secret service, placed her under house arrest on August 23, 1861.³⁷ In his official report, Pinkerton paid tribute to "her almost irresistible seductive powers" that she unscrupulously used on "persons holding places of honor and profit under the government."³⁸ Five months later she was relocated to the Old Capital Prison after officials had evidence of her continuance of sending information out of Washington.³⁹

When Rose refused to take an oath of allegiance or give a parole not to aid the enemy, she was ordered to be "conveyed beyond the Union lines in to Virginia." She proudly recorded President Davis' greeting upon her arrival, "But for you," he said, "there would have been no battle of Bull Run."⁴⁰ Once in Virginia, President Davis implored Rose to sail to Britain and France to help enlist the support of the sympathetic

Europeans.⁴¹ While they are her memoirs, *My Imprisonment and the First Year of Abolition Rule at Washington*, were published and well received throughout the British Isles. She found strong sympathy and financial support for the South, especially among the ruling classes.⁴²

Upon her return to the United States a year later, a Union gunboat pursued her British blockade-runner. To avoid capture, she fled in a rowboat, which capsized before reaching shore. It is said that the weight of the gold she carried as a result of the royalties she received from her book caused her to sink and drown. She washed onto shore a day later. Mrs. Varina Davis, wife of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, wrote of her after her death in a letter to Mary Chesnut.

Nothing has so impressed me as the account of poor Mrs. Greenhow's sudden summons to a higher court than those she strove to shine in. And not an hour in the day is the vivid picture which exists in my mind obliterated of the men who rowed her in across "the cruel crawling, hungry foam" and her poor wasted beautiful face all divested of its meretricious ornaments and her scheming head hanging helplessly upon those who but an hour before she felt so able and willing to deceive. She was a great woman spoiled by education—or the want of it. She has left few less prudent women behind her—and many less devoted to our cause."⁴³

In October 1864, Rose was buried with full military honors in the Oakdale Cemetery in Wilmington, North Carolina.⁴⁴



Rose Greenhow

Figure 5.



Belle Boyd

Figure 6.

Belle Boyd. Another famous Confederate spy, Belle Boyd was defiant and theatrical like Rose Greenhow, but she was also young, strong and unembittered, playing the role of a Southern heroine with zest.⁴⁵ From her home in Martinsburg, Belle, a nurse turned scout and spy, moved through the battle zones with messages for Jackson, Beauregard, Stuart and others. She was also Stonewall Jackson's chief of scouts.⁴⁶

After her second arrest in Martinsburg, Belle moved in with a relative in Front Royal. The Union Army's General Shields had already taken over the house but he allowed them to remain with the servant staff. One evening Belle listened to General Shields and his officers discussing strategy through a knothole she had enlarged in the ceiling over the dining room table. She crept out of the house after midnight and rode

fifteen miles to deliver the intelligence to General Ashby and return home before sunrise.⁴⁷

Belle is best known for her aid to General Jackson on May 23, 1862, during his campaign in the Shenandoah Valley and is credited for the Confederates' victory at Front Royal. Major Henry Kyd Douglas, a Confederate officer under Stonewall Jackson, described her role in defeating the Union.

We stopped to form on a hill overlooking the small town of Front Royal and the hurried movement of blue-coats and the galloping of horsemen here and there told of the confusion in the enemy's camp. General Jackson, not knowing the force of the enemy there was so small or so unprepared by reinforcements for his approach, was endeavoring to take in the situation before ordering the advance.

I observed, almost immediately, the figure of a woman in white glide swiftly out of town on our right and, after making a little circuit, run rapidly up a ravine in our direction and then disappear from sight.

[General Ewell] sent me to meet her and ascertain what she wanted . . . As I drew near, her speed slackened, and I was startled, momentarily, at hearing her call my name. But I was not much astonished when I saw that the visitor was the well-known Belle Boyd who I had known from her earliest girlhood. She was just the girl to dare to do this thing.

Nearly exhausted, and with her hand pressed against her heart, she said in gasps, "I knew it must be Stonewall, when I heard the first gun. Go back quick and tell him that the Yankee force is very small—one regiment of Maryland infantry, several pieces of artillery and several companies of cavalry. Tell him I know, for I went through the camps and got it out of an officer. Tell him to charge right down and he will catch them all. I must hurry back. Good-by. My love to all the dear boys—and remember if you meet me in town you haven't seen me today."⁴⁸

The Confederates saved the bridges at Front Royal because of Belle's courage. "Miss Belle Boyd," said General Jackson in a note to her, "I thank you, for myself and for the army, for the immense service you have rendered your country today."⁴⁹

Belle was twice imprisoned and banished to the South. She was caught and imprisoned a third time on board a blockade-runner ship bound for England in the spring

of 1863. She was imprisoned at Fort Warren and sentenced to death. She was later placed in the custody of Ensign Samuel Hardinge, the commander of the vessel that captured the blockade-runner. On the trip to Boston, they fell in love and with the help of Hardinge, Belle made her escape to England via Canada when they docked in Boston. Hardinge was dismissed from the service and joined Belle in England. They were married in 1864.⁵⁰

Belle Boyd married twice more after the untimely death of Samuel Hardinge. She became an actress in England, a lecturer in the United States and wrote her autobiography entitled *Belle Boyd in Camp and Prison*.⁵¹

Soldiers in Disguise

Probably the most interesting and least written about women in the Civil War are what Richard Hall called “patriots in disguise.” While we know they had various reasons for dressing as men to fight alongside male soldiers, it was not an acceptable occupation for women and when their true identities were discovered, they were sent home. It is often these women that we know about. There are others that wrote about their lives as soldiers: Loreta Velasques and Sarah Emma Edmonds write of some exciting adventures, particularly as spies. And there is Rosetta Wakeman, a young lady from New York who expresses some insights into why women joined the army and daily life through letters to her family. Some women, like Jennie Hodges, took on the role of Albert Cashier both in war and in peace, not being discovered until late in life. These are the patriot warriors that represent all women known and unknown that fought and sometimes died for their country.

Albert Cashier—Jennie Hodges. Albert Cashier holds the record for the longest documented length of service by a female soldier from her enlistment in the 95th Illinois Infantry, Second Brigade, 17th Army Corp in September 1862, about a month after the regiment was formed.⁵² She was 18 years old at her enlistment and listed her occupation as farmer. This was not the first time she had been disguised as a man. An Irish immigrant, Jennie arrived in the United States as a shipboard stowaway and disguised as a boy at a young age.⁵³

Albert took part in forty battles and skirmishes with her regiment, including Vicksburg, Nashville and Mobile. He was never wounded. During the Vicksburg campaign, Captain Bush, her commander, often selected Albert for foraging and skirmishing duty “because he was considered very dependable, was in vigorous good health, and was apparently fearless.”⁵⁴ He was captured once, but he seized a gun from the guard, knocked him down and fled back to her regiment.⁵⁵

After the war, Cashier worked as a farmhand and handyman in small towns in Illinois before settling down in Saunemin. It wasn’t until a freak automobile accident in 1911 that his true identity was discovered, but Cashier convinced the doctor and his employer, former State Senator Ira M. Lish to keep his secret.⁵⁶ Because Albert had managed to secure a military pension in 1907, Senator Lish and the physician were able to help Cashier gain admission to the Soldier’s and Sailor’s Home at Quincy, Illinois. The story of her secret life didn’t leak out to the public until 1913.⁵⁷

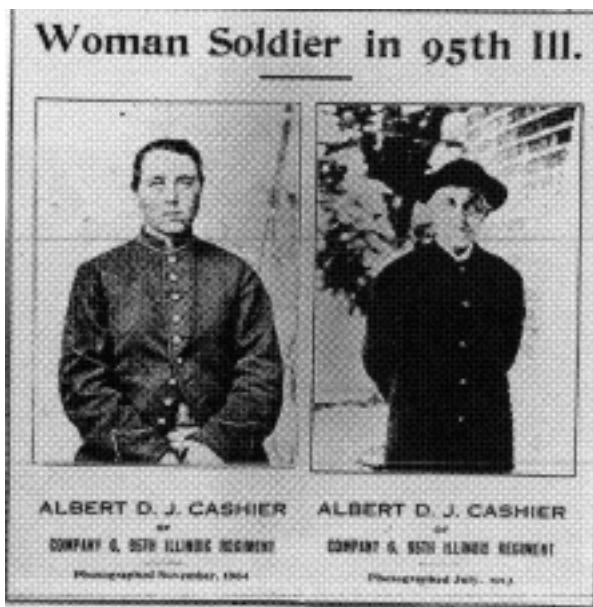
When the news of her secret was published in the *Washington Sunday Star*, fellow soldiers from the 95th Regiment spoke out, commenting on “Albert’s” soldierly skills, bravery and fortitude. He had impressed them all with his nerveless performance in

combat situations and tirelessness on the march. Gerhard P. Clausius wrote about his handling of the musket in battle.

He was equal on any in the company.... In spite of his lack of height and brawn, he was able to withstand...the problems of an infantryman as well as his comrades who were bigger and brawnier. If a husky comrade assisted Albert in handling a heavy assignment [one which required lifting or pushing], Albert would volunteer to help with his chores of washing clothes or replacing buttons; Albert seemed especially adept at those tasks so despised by the infantryman.⁵⁸

Once her secret was discovered, she was forced to wear a skirt. It was so awkward that she fell and hurt her hip. She never fully recovered. When former First Sergeant Charles W. Ives, visited her at the Watertown State Hospital for the Insane, he found a frail 70-year old woman whose spirit was broken because of the discovery. She told Ives during the visit, "Lots of boys enlisted under the wrong name. So did I. The country needed men, and I wanted excitement."⁵⁹

Hodges died on October 10, 1915, at age 71. She was buried wearing her Union uniform with a flag draped casket with full military honors. The inscription on her tombstone in Saunemin Cemetery reads: ALBERT D. J. CASHIER, CO. G, 95 ILL. INF.⁶⁰



**Jennie Hodges alias
Albert Cashier**

Figure 7.



**Rosetta Wakeman alias
Lyons Wakeman**

Figure 8.

Private Lyons Wakeman—Sarah Rosetta Wakeman. Since their lives as soldiers were secret, it is hard to know or understand the motivation, feelings and opinions of these courageous women. We get a glimpse of their lives through Rosetta Wakeman. Enlisting in the 153rd Regiment, New York State Volunteers, on August 30, 1862, at age 19, Rosetta shared her thoughts through letters to her family.⁶¹

Like many others, one strong motivation for her enlistment was money to help her family. In early August 1862, Rosetta left home dressed as a man looking for a job in a nearby town. Rosetta explained her decision to enlist to her family in her first letter to them, dated November 24, 1862.

When I left you I went to Binghamton. I saw you there. I meet you coming home from meeting. I went to work with Stephen Saldon the next day. I work half a month for 4\$ in money. I was only 7 miles from Binghamton up the river. When I got done [with] work I went on the

canal to work. I agreed to run 4 trips from Binghamton to Utica for 20\$ in money, but this load of coal was going to Canajoharie, Montgomery Co.

When I got there I saw some soldiers. They wanted I should enlist and so I did. I got 100 and 52\$ in money. I enlisted for 3 years or soon [as] discharged. All the money I send you I want you should spend it for the family in clothing or something to eat. Don't save it for me for I can get all the money I want. If I ever return I shall have money enough for my self and to divide with you.⁶²

In a later letter she explained her plans to help the family get out of debt.

You mustn't trouble you Self about me. I am contented. I want you to get along the best way you can until this war is over. I believe that God will Spare my life to come home once more. Then I will help you pay you debts. I will send you more or less money while I am a soldier. When I get out of the service I will make money enough to pay all the debts you owe.⁶³

She mentioned sending money to her family in numerous subsequent letters.

I send 4 dollars. I want you [to] let Robert have 1 and Celestia 1, Lois 1, and keep the other you self. Robert, you let Father take the money and buy you a knife for to remember me by.⁶⁴

We expect to get four months pay this week and if I do I shall have 60 dollars in money. I am getting 13 dollars per month. I will send part of it home to you.⁶⁵

I will send you 30\$ as soon as I can get to the express office.⁶⁶

Money was not the only reason for leaving home. Being independent seemed to be important to Rosetta too.

I can tell you what made me leave home. It was because I had got tired of stay[ing] in that neighborhood. I know that I Could help you more to leave home than to stay there with you. So I left. I am not sorry that I left you. I believe that is will be all for the best yet.

If I ever own a farm It will be in Wisconsin. On the Prairie. I [am] enjoying my Self better this summer than I ever did before in this world. I have good Clothing and enough to eat and nothing to do, only handle my gun and that I can do as well as the rest of them.⁶⁷

Military life seemed to appeal to Rosetta. She is able-bodied to do the job and willing to accept whatever fate God had in store for her.

We are adrilling nowadays. Company drill in the morning and a battalion drill in the afternoon. For my part I like to drill. I think a Skirmish drill is the prettiest drill that ever was drill. I have got So that I Can drill just as well as any man there is in my regiment. When Colonel Davis gives a order I know What the regiment is agoing to do just as well as he does.⁶⁸

I don't know how long before I shall have to go into the field of battle. For my part I don't Care. I don't feel afraid to go. I don't believe there are any Rebel's bullet made for me yet. Nor I don't Care if there is. I am as independent as a hog on the ice. If it is God will for me to fall in the field of battle, it is my will to go and never return home.⁶⁹

The 153rd was assigned duty in the Washington area from the time of Rosetta's enlistment until late February 1864, when the unit was transferred to the field as part of Major General Nathaniel P. Banks' Red River Campaign in Louisiana. Her regiment played a key role in the Battle of Pleasant Hill on April 9, 1864. Private Wakeman was on the front lines and in the fiercest fighting during the four-hour battle. At midnight, the Union army began its 40-mile retreat back to Grand Encore Landing, arriving there on April 11⁷⁰. It was from there that Rosetta wrote her last known letter home.

Our army made an advance up the river to pleasant hill about 40 miles. There we had a fight. The first day of the fight our army got whip[p]ed and we had to retreat back about ten miles. The next day the fight was renewed and the firing took place about eight o'Clock in the morning. There was a heavy Cannonading all day and a Sharp firing of infantry. I was not in the first day's fight but the next day, I had to face the enemy bullets with my regiment. I was under fire about four hours and laid on the field of battle all night. There was three wounded in my Co. and one killed.

I feel thankful to God that he spared my life and I pray to him that he will lead me safe through the field of battle and that I may return home safe.⁷¹

While Rosetta was spared from death on the battlefield, she might have been better off had she died that way. Unfortunately, she contracted chronic diarrhea after persevering through 400 miles of hard marching, camping and fighting in a subtropical climate, drinking bad water and eating infrequently. She was admitted to 153rd

Regimental Hospital and subsequently transferred to the Marine U.S.A. General Hospital in New Orleans where she died less than a month later on June 19, 1864. Her true identity was never discovered and she was given a soldier's burial in Chalmette National Cemetery, New Orleans. Her headstone has her enlisted name: Lyons Wakeman.⁷²

Franklin Thompson—Sarah Emma Edmonds. Emma enlisted in the Second Michigan Cavalry as a male nurse but according to her book, *Nurse and Spy*, she served as nurse, spy, mail carrier and soldier.⁷³ Sarah's reasons for enlisting had some similarity to Rosetta. She grew up on a farm that had to struggle to make ends meet. As a child, Sarah dressed in boys' clothes and worked as farmhands. With her stern father's approval she learned to swim, hunt, fish, paddle a canoe and row a boat. But more important to her future career, she became an expert shot and learned many survival skills that would stand her in good stead as a soldier. Her nursing skills she learned from her mother.⁷⁴ She, like Rosetta, yearned for independence and freedom, a privilege held only by men at the time. She said later, "I greatly preferred the privilege of earning my own bread and butter."⁷⁵ Emma left home to apprentice in a millinery shop without her father's knowledge to avoid an arranged marriage. It is believed she left with her mother's help. When her mother sent word her father had discovered her whereabouts, she decided to go it alone. As a woman she would lose her freedom so she dressed as a man and continued to do so until she left the army. She supported herself as a bookseller for several years until she joined Company F of the 2nd Michigan Regiment of Volunteer Infantry on April 17, 1861.⁷⁶ She described her feelings in making the decision in an interview after the war:

I spent days and nights of anxious thought in deciding in what capacity I should try to serve the Union cause; and during all my deliberations this

fact was borne in upon me, viz.: That I could best serve the interests of the Union cause in male attire—could better perform the necessary duties for sick and wounded men, and less embarrassment to them and to myself as a man than as a woman.⁷⁷

Emma fought in the battle of the 1st Bull Run and in the Peninsular Campaign of 1862. In March, Colonel Orlando Poe, commander of the 2nd Michigan, appointed Frank Thompson regimental mail carrier. Emma described postal duties as a perfect cover for her “secret service” spying missions behind enemy lines, and away from prying eyes, which might have had more time to see through her disguise.⁷⁸

While there is no documentation to prove it, Emma writes that General McClellan interviewed her personally for a position in the secret service. She had her first mission in the Peninsular Campaign. Dressed as a black man named “Old Ned” she infiltrated the Confederate lines in Yorktown to determine the ordinance and layout of defenses. She played her part well, being put in a work detail building fortifications with about one hundred other Negroes. Before she made her escape back to the Union lines with the information she collected, she was put on guard duty.⁷⁹ Emma wrote about seeing the soldiers from Yorktown in a field hospital after the battle in Williamsburg:

Upon visiting the wounded rebels I saw several whom I met in Yorktown, among them the sergeant of the picket post who had given me a friendly shake and told me if I slept on my post he would shoot me like a dog. He was pretty badly wounded, and did not seem to remember me.⁸⁰

Frank turned out to be a master of disguise, being able to dress as both man and woman, black or white. On one occasion she dressed as a poor Irish female peddler named Bridget; on another she was a black woman who became a cook for the Confederate army.⁸¹

Emma seemed to enjoy the danger and excitement of her job. At the Battle of Gaines’ Mill, Frank was sent around to the field hospitals to warn them of the army’s

retreat. She described her experience when she got caught between enemy and friendly lines:

A perfect blaze both of musketry and artillery. Nothing but the power of the Almighty could have shielded me from such a storm of shot and shell, and brought me through unscathed. It seems to me now that it was almost as much of a miracle as that of the three Hebrew children coming forth from the fiery furnace without even the smell of fire upon them.⁸²

While women like Emma were always afraid of discovery, they seemed to know others in the same predicament. On September 17, 1862, Emma was detached to provide medical support at the battle of Antietam. While she was caring for the wounded soldiers, one in particular caught her attention. When she approached the soldier and offered assistance the look between them confirmed their suspicions. The dying soldier said:

“I can trust you, and will tell you a secret. I am not what I seem, but am a female. I enlisted from the purest motives, and have remained undiscovered and unsuspected. I have neither father, mother nor sister. My only brother was killed today. I closed his eyes about an hour before I was wounded. I shall soon be with him. I am a Christian, and have maintained the Christian character ever since I entered the army. ... I wish you to bury me with your own hands, that none may know after my death that I am other than my appearance indicates.”⁸³

Emma assured the dying woman her request would be honored and stayed with her until her death. Then:

...making a grave for her under the shadow of a mulberry tree near the battlefield, apart from all others. ...I carried her remains to that lonely spot and gave her a soldier's burial, without coffin or shroud, only a blanket for a winding-sheet. There she sleeps in that beautiful forest where the soft southern breezes sigh mournfully through the foliage, and the little birds sing sweetly above her grave.⁸⁴

Emma also wrote about the senselessness of war from her experience as a battlefield courier for General Poe at the battle of Fredericksburg:

...charging again and again upon those terrible stone walls and fortifications, after being repulsed every time with more than half their number lying on the ground.... But when it was proved to a demonstration that it was morally impossible to take and retain those heights, in consequence of the natural advantage of position which the rebels occupied. ...whose fault was it that the attempt was made time after time, until the field was literally piled with dead and ran red with blood?⁸⁵

Many historians after her have asked the same question.

In the spring of 1863, the 2nd Michigan Regiment was transferred to Kentucky to join the Army of the Ohio.⁸⁶ Emma's first reconnoitering mission in the area led to her temporary capture. She dressed in a prisoner's clothes and set out by rail behind enemy lines under the ruse of buying eggs and butter for the rebel army at the farmhouses. She came upon a wedding party of a recruiting officer, Captain Logan:

I was questioned pretty sharply by the handsome captain in regard to the nature of my business in that locality, but finding me an innocent, straightforward Kentuckian, he came to the conclusion that I was all right. But he also arrived at the conclusion that I was old enough to be in the army.⁸⁷

Emma was put under guard and put her into service in a newly formed Confederate unit. The next day the company encountered a Federal-reconnoitering unit. In the confusion, Emma got behind the Federals who recognized her. She shot Captain Logan and was attacked by some of the rebel soldiers but Emma was not injured. The Federal cavalrymen intervened and drove the attackers back. Emma reported later:

I was highly commended by the commanding general for my coolness throughout the whole affair, and was told kindly and candidly that I would not be permitted to go out again in that vicinity, in the capacity of a spy, as I would most assuredly meet with some of those who had seen me desert their ranks, and I would consequently be hung up to the nearest tree.⁸⁸

Her restrictions led to her appointment as a detective inside the lines to identify double agents in their unit. Emma dressed in civilian clothes and as Frank, was befriended by a Rebel sympathizer merchant who gave "him" a job as a clerk. Emma

won his confidence and learned about three rebels within Federal lines. Through the merchant she arranged a meeting with one of them so she could enter into Confederate service. She continued the story:

That afternoon I was sent out again to dispose of some goods to the soldiers, and while I was gone took the favorable opportunity of informing the Provost Marshal of my intended escape the following night with my brother spy.

The night came, and we started about nine o'clock. As we walked along toward the rebel lines the spy seemed to think that I was a true patriot in the rebel cause, for he entertained me with a long conversation concerning his exploits in the secret service; and of the other two [spies] who were still in camp he said one of them was a sutler, and the other sold photographs of our generals.

As soon as we were captured we were searched, and documents found on my companion which condemned him as a spy.... The next thing to be done was to find the other two spies. The sutler was found and put under arrest, and his goods confiscated, but the dealer in photographs had made his escape.

I never dared go back to Louisville again, for I had ample reason to believe that my life would pay the penalty if I did.

In mid-April 1863, Emma suffered a relapse of a serious case of malaria she originally contracted while fighting in Chickahominy Swamps, Virginia.⁸⁹ Fearing disclosure of her true identity, she requested but was denied leave.⁹⁰ Now feeling desperate, she disguised herself once more and slipped through the lines, ending up in Oberlin, Ohio.⁹¹ In an interview after the war, Captain William B. Morse described the concern for "Frank" by her fellow soldier's: "Franklin [Thompson] was known by every man in the regiment and her desertion was the topic of every campfire. The beardless boy was a universal favorite, and much anxiety was expressed for her safety."

In Oberlin, she took four weeks to recuperate before traveling to Pittsburgh to acquire women's clothes and forever change back into Emma. When she returned to the

Oberlin boarding house, they didn't recognize Emma and "Frank." During this time she wrote her book, dedicating it "To the sick and wounded soldiers of the Army of the Potomac." She also instructed the publisher to contribute most of the proceeds to the Sanitary Commission, the Christian commission and various soldier aid societies. Her book was an instant success, reportedly selling more than 175,000 copies.⁹² When asked about its authenticity after the war, Emma admitted it was exaggerated.⁹³ She said, "...most of the experiences there recorded were either my own or came under my own observation."⁹⁴

Now fully recovered, Emma returned to hospital duty as a female nurse for the Sanitary Commission at Harpers Ferry, serving in hospitals of the Army of Cumberland. She continued to care for Union soldiers until the close of the war.⁹⁵

At Harpers Ferry she met and later married Linus Seelye, a widower and carpenter from New Brunswick, Canada. Idealistic northerners, Linus and Sarah (she began to use Sarah after her marriage) volunteered to help freed men find jobs and to educate them. In 1875 they were recruited to take charge of a Negro orphans' home in Lateche, Louisiana. Biographer wrote of Sarah:

A good part of [her] life, aside from her daring and adventurous exploits in the Union army, was devoted to helping other people, both before and after her marriage. ...Perhaps this great selflessness is what makes Emma Seelye appear so much more admirable than many of her contemporaries.⁹⁶

She didn't apply for her pension until she needed funds to build a soldier's home. She was eventually able to satisfactorily prove to the Federal government that she had served honorably during the conflict and in 1884 was given a pension of twelve dollars a month and a \$100 bounty.⁹⁷ She was also the only woman mustered as a regular member into the Grand Army of the Republic.⁹⁸ Emma died on September 5, 1898, after

recurring bouts of malaria, never realizing her dream of a veteran's home but well respected and loved by those who knew her.⁹⁹



**Sarah Emma Edmonds
alias Franklin Thompson**

Figure 9.



**Loreta Velasquez alias
Lt. Henry T. Buford**

Figure 10.

Lieutenant Henry T. Buford—Loreta Janeta Velasquez. The Confederates' most well known woman soldier and spy was Loreta Velasquez but unlike Emma, Rosetta and Jenny, her motivation for enlisting was her soldier husband. She too, like Emma, wrote an autobiography, *The Woman in Battle* however, many of the stories cannot be substantiated and were called by some “sensational exaggerations” to increase sales.

Born in Havana, Cuba, in 1842, Loreta was sent to New Orleans to live with her aunt to finish her education. It is there she met and married a wealthy Louisiana farmer and army officer. Sadly, their children died in infancy.¹⁰⁰ When the War Between the States began, Loreta insisted her husband resign his commission and join the Confederate army.

I was perfectly wild on the subject of war; and although I did not tell my husband so, I was resolved to forsake him if he raised his sword against the South. ...Having decided to enter the Confederacy service as a soldier,

I desired, if possible, to obtain my husband's consent, but he would not listen to anything I had to say o the subject; and all I could do was to wait his departure for the seat of war, in order to put my plans into execution without his knowledge. I was obstinately bent upon realizing the dream of my life, whether he approved of my course or not.¹⁰¹

Her dream, the other motivation for becoming a soldier, can be traced to her childhood.

From my earlier recollections my mind had been filled with aspirations of the most ardent kind to fill some great sphere. I expended all my pocket money, not in candies and cakes, as most girls are in the habit of doing, but in the purchase of books which related the events of the lives of kings, princes, and soldiers. ... Joan of Arc became my heroine, and I longed for an opportunity to become such another as she. I was fond of imagining myself as the hero of most stupendous adventures.¹⁰²

After her husband was assigned to Pensacola, Florida, to train Confederate soldiers, Loreta sought the help of a friend to acquire a uniform, complete with artificial mustache and beard.¹⁰³ She took the name H.T. Buford and promoted herself to lieutenant.¹⁰⁴

To avoid suspicion, she traveled to Hurlburt Station, Arkansas, where, in less than a week, she had formed her own private battalion of 236 recruits, named the Arkansas Independents.¹⁰⁵ She financed the battalion with her own money and headed to Pensacola to present her unit to her husband and hopefully convince him to let her join him.¹⁰⁶ Unfortunately, her husband was killed when a carbine exploded while he was training some men before they arrived. Loretta abandoned her unit to become an independent soldier, traveling where she could find action.¹⁰⁷

She served the Confederacy as a soldier at the 1st Manassas, Ball's Bluff, Fort Pillow and Shiloh.¹⁰⁸ She wrote of the elation after the Confederate victory at Bull Run, concluding, the battle "only quickened my ardor to participate in another affair of a similar kind. ... there is a positive enjoyment in the deadly perils of the occasion that

nothing can equal.”¹⁰⁹ The reality of war became more evident to Loreta after she killed an enemy soldier.

I fired my revolver at another officer—a major, I believe—who was in the act of jumping into the river. I saw him spring into the air, and fall; and then turned my head away, shuddering at what I had done, although I believed that it was only my duty. An officer near me exclaimed, “Lieutenant, your ball took him,”—words that sent a thrill of horror through me.¹¹⁰

Her dream of being the second Joan of Arc she decided

was a mere girlish fancy, which my very first experience as a soldier dissipated forever... convincing me that a woman like myself, who had a talent for assuming disguises... was possessed of courage, resolution, and energy, backed up by a ready wit, a plausible address, and attractive manners, had it in her power to perform many services of the most vital importance, which it would be impossible for a man even to attempt.¹¹¹

She decided to freelance as spy in Washington, D.C., borrowing women’s clothes and managing to mingle with society. She claimed to have met Lincoln and other Federal officials in the two weeks she played this new role. Now she believed she was ready to earn an appointment in the Confederate detective corps to show what she could do.¹¹²

Resuming her male disguise, she set out for Columbus, Tennessee, where she secured a position in the detective corps as a military conductor on the Nashville Railroad for a short time. She related, “I was a personage of considerable importance, not only to the officers and soldiers who were going back and forth, but to the ladies who courted me with remarkable assiduity, with a view of inducing me to grant them favors.”¹¹³

Returning to soldiering duties, she participated in the battle at Fort Donelson. The Confederate defeat almost broke her fighting spirit.

If repentance for my rashness in resolving to play a soldier’s part in the war was ever to overcome me, however, now was the time; and I confess that, as the sleet stung my face, and the biting winds cut me to the bones, I wished myself well out of it, and longed for the siege to be over in some shape, even if relief came only through defeat. The idea of defeat,

however, was too intolerable to be thought of, and I banished it from my mind whenever it occurred to me, and argued with myself that I was no better than the thousands of brave men around, who were suffering these wintry blasts as much as I. ... I could face the cannon better than I could this bitter weather, and I could suffer myself better than I could bear to hear the cries and groans of these wounded men, lying out on the frozen ground, exposed to the beating of the pitiless storm. Several times I felt as if I could stand it no longer, and was tempted to give the whole thing up, and lie down upon the ground and die.¹¹⁴

On April 5, 1862, Loreta was seriously wounded by mortar shrapnel while fighting near Shiloh Church and although her true sex discovered during treatment of her wounds, the doctor who treated her aided in her departure before anyone else found out.¹¹⁵ Loreta pursued her role as a spy but admits she became well known if by rumor only. She was arrested in New Orleans and Lynchburg for impersonating a man but since no one was willing to risk proving it, she was released.

Loreta was reunited with and married Captain Thomas De Caulp, who she fought with at the battle of Shiloh. He left her to return to his unit shortly after the wedding but died soon after being captured.¹¹⁶ After his death she felt if left her

nothing to do but to launch once more on a life of adventure, and to devote my energies to the advancement of the Confederate cause. ... On reviewing the whole subject in my mind, I became more than ever convinced that the secret service rather than the army would afford me the best field for the exercise of my talent.¹¹⁷

The rest of the years in service to the Confederacy were dedicated to espionage and intelligence gathering. Loreta wrote about her assistance to General Forrest, providing information on the disposition and numbers of Federal troops around Colliersville.¹¹⁸ She also played a role in the attack on Johnston's Island.¹¹⁹ In the summer and fall of 1864, the Confederate secret service turned their activities toward "back door" operations out of Canada to confuse and harass the Federal forces and undermine support for the

war.¹²⁰ She even penetrated the staff of Colonel Lafayette C. Baker, chief of the U.S. Secret Service.¹²¹ While working for him, Baker confided in her:

Some of my people are after a spy now who has been travelling between Richmond and Canada, but they don't seem to be able to lay their hands on her. If they don't catch her soon, I have half a mind to let you try what you can do, if you succeed well with your present trip.¹²²

The spy Colonel Baker was talking about was none other than Loreta herself. "I don't know to this day," she reported in her memoirs, "whether he ever discovered that I was a Confederate secret service agent."¹²³

On April 26, 1865, (Confederate General Joseph Johnston's day of surrender) she sailed to Europe with her brother and his family.¹²⁴ Not much is known about her life afterwards. She published her book, *The Woman in Battle*, in 1876 to help support herself and her child. She acknowledges two more husbands after the war and spent her time traveling the world, gold prospecting and wild west adventures among other things.¹²⁵ It is apparent her spirit of adventure never failed her.

The stories of these soldiers are intended to provide just a glimpse of the contributions by many of their sisters in the struggle between the Union and the Confederacy, but they were not the only women on the battlefield.

Notes

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³ Hall, 7.

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⁶ Hall, 4.

⁷ David E. Jones, *Women Warriors: A History*. (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1997), 239 and Hall, 4.

⁸ Hall, 4-5.

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¹¹ Hall, 6.

¹² Hall, 6.

¹³ Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Women in the Civil War*. (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 87.

¹⁴ Anne J. Bailey, "The Defenders: The Nancy Harts," In *Valor and Lace: The Roles of Confederate Women, 1861-1865*, ed. Mauriel Phillips Joslyn. (Murfreesboro, Tenn.: Southern Heritage Press, 1996), 36.

¹⁵ Bailey, 36.

¹⁶ Bailey, 47.

¹⁷ Bailey, 36.

¹⁸ Bailey, 36-38.

¹⁹ Bailey, 38-39.

²⁰ Bailey, 39-40.

²¹ Bailey, 42-43.

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²³ Jeanne M. Christie, "The Prisoner: The Incarceration of Mrs. Mary M. Stockton Terry," In *Valor and Lace: The Roles of Confederate Women, 1861-1865*, ed. by Mauriel Phillips Joslyn. (Murfreesboro, Tenn.: Southern Heritage Press, 1996), 128.

²⁴ Massey, 105.

²⁵ Massey, 105.

²⁶ Massey, 105.

²⁷ Massey, 87.

²⁸ "Rose O'Neal Greenhow Papers," n.p.; on-line, Internet. 23 December 1998, available from <http://odyssey.lib.duke.edu/greenhow/>.

²⁹ Jones, 232.

³⁰ Leech, 94-95.

³¹ Massey, 90-91.

³² Leech, 95.

³³ Massey, 91 and Leech, 95.

³⁴ Leech, 95.

³⁵ Margaret Leech, *Reveille in Washington, 1860-1965*. (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1945), 96-97.

³⁶ Leech, 135.

³⁷ Leech, 135.

³⁸ Leech, 137.

³⁹ Leech, 135.

⁴⁰ Leech, 156.

⁴¹ "Rose O'Neal Greenhow Papers," n.p.; on-line, Internet. 23 December 1998, available from <http://odyssey.lib.duke.edu/greenhow/> and Jeanne M. Christie, "The Prisoner: The Incarceration of Mrs. Mary M. Stockton Terry," In *Valor and Lace: The*

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⁴³ Mary Boykin Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), 664.

⁴⁴ "Rose O'Neal Greenhow Papers."

⁴⁵ Leech, 156.

⁴⁶ Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Women in the Civil War*. (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 96 and David E. Jones, *Women Warriors: A History*. (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1997), 232-233.

⁴⁷ Jones, 233.

⁴⁸ B. A. Botkin, ed., *A Civil War Treasury of Tales, Legends and Folklore*. (New York: Random House, 1960), 137-139.

⁴⁹ Marilyn Mayer Culpepper, *Trials and Triumphs: Women of the American Civil War*. (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 1991), 41 and Jones, 233.

⁵⁰ John P. Dever and Maria C. Dever, *Women and the Military*. (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1995), 147; Leech, 432; and Massey, 97.

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⁵² Sarah Rosetta Wakeman, *An Uncommon Soldier*, ed. by Lauren Cook Burgess. (Pasedena, MD.: The MINERVA Center, 1994), 67 and Richard Hall, *Patriots in Disguise: Women Warriors of the Civil War*. (New York: Paragon House, 1993), 23-24.

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⁵⁸ Hall, 25.

⁵⁹ Hall, 25.

⁶⁰ Hall, 26.

⁶¹ Wakeman, 10.

⁶² Wakeman, 18.

⁶³ Wakeman, 25.

⁶⁴ Wakeman, 24.

⁶⁵ Wakeman, 25.

⁶⁶ Sarah Rosetta Wakeman, *An Uncommon Soldier*, ed. by Lauren Cook Burgess. (Pasedena, MD.: The MINERVA Center, 1994), 28.

⁶⁷ Wakeman, 31.

⁶⁸ Wakeman, 48.

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⁷³ Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Women in the Civil War*. (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 81 and Marilyn Mayer Culpepper, *Trials and Triumphs: Women*

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⁷⁴ Richard Hall, *Patriots in Disguise: Women Warriors of the Civil War*. (New York: Paragon House, 1993), 74-75.

⁷⁵ Hall, 75.

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⁷⁷ Hall, 80-81.

⁷⁸ Jones, 237 and Hall, 47.

⁷⁹ Hall, 48-49.

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⁸¹ John P. Dever and Maria C. Dever, *Women and the Military*. (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1995), 131 and Hall, 64-65.

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⁸⁴ Hall, 68.

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⁸⁶ Jones, 237.

⁸⁷ Hall, 70.

⁸⁸ Hall, 71.

⁸⁹ Jones, 237.

⁹⁰ Massey, 81.

⁹¹ Hall, 72 and Jones, 238.

⁹² Hall, 83.

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⁹⁴ Hall, 84.

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⁹⁶ Hall, 85.

⁹⁷ Massey, 81.

⁹⁸ Dever & Dever, 131.

⁹⁹ Hall, 96.

¹⁰⁰ Norma Jean Perkins, "The Soldier: Loreta Janeta Velazquez Alias Lt. Harry T. Buford," In *Valor and Lace: The Roles of Confederate Women, 1861-1865*, ed. by Mauriel Phillips Joslyn. (Murfreesboro, Tenn.: Southern Heritage Press, 1996), 58-59 and Jones, 233.

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¹⁰² Jones, 234.

¹⁰³ Dever & Dever, 143, Perkins, 59.

¹⁰⁴ Jones, 234.

¹⁰⁵ Perkins, 59-60.

¹⁰⁶ Jones, 234.

¹⁰⁷ Perkins, 60.

¹⁰⁸ Massey, 82.

¹⁰⁹ Hall, 111.

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- ¹¹⁰ Jones, 235-236.
- ¹¹¹ Hall, 113-114.
- ¹¹² Hall, 114.
- ¹¹³ Hall, 114-115.
- ¹¹⁴ Jones, 236.
- ¹¹⁵ Jones, 236 and Hall, 122.
- ¹¹⁶ Perkins 66 and Hall, 133-135.
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- ¹¹⁸ Hall, 137-138.
- ¹¹⁹ Hall, 141.
- ¹²⁰ Hall, 141.
- ¹²¹ Jones, 236.
- ¹²² Hall, 143.
- ¹²³ Hall, 150.
- ¹²⁴ Perkins, 66.
- ¹²⁵ Jones, 236-237 and Hall, 151-154.

Chapter 4

Angels of Mercy

I have been rewarded a thousand times for all I have sacrificed or endured for the soldiers. Sacred tears of gratitude, blessings from pale lips, and seats beside death beds of our country's noblest sons, have been mine; and though some still live who remember the "cup of cold water," the many have "sealed their devotion to their country with their lives."

—Sarah Sampson

The Civil War marked a milestone in the transformation of nursing from a menial service to a genuine profession. The war also produced important innovations in army medical practice, such as the creation of a special ambulance corps for first-aid treatment of the wounded and their evacuation to field hospitals. Wearing special uniforms and imbued with high morale, these noncombatant medics risked their lives to reach the wounded in the midst of battle and evacuate them as quickly as possible to surgeon's stations and field hospitals.¹

The courage and energy demonstrated by many women chipped away at the weaker-sex image. The wife of George Templeton Strong (treasurer of the Sanitary Commission) insisted on going to the Virginia Peninsula as a volunteer nurse in June 1862. There she performed capably, found new purpose in her life and transformed her husband's view of her. "The little woman has come out amazingly strong during these two months," wrote Strong in his diary. "Have never given her credit for a tithe of the enterprise, pluck, discretion and force of character that she has shown. God bless her."²

Nurses and Doctors On and Off the Battlefield

Nurses

Mary Ann Bickerdyke. This hard-charging widow from Illinois began her service in 1861 at the fever-ridden army base hospitals in Cairo, Illinois. She swept through the camp like an avenging angel, cooking, nursing and providing supplies for Union Soldiers.³

Nicknamed the “cyclone in calico, she took charge in cleaning up and organizing the camps with General Grant’s and then General Sherman’s armies from Fort Donelson to Atlanta, often to the aggravation of surgeons and nurses.⁴ On one occasion a senior-ranking surgeon appealed to General Grant, accusing Mrs. Bickerdyke of misconduct. Grant replied, “My God, man, Mother Bickerdyke outranks everybody, even Lincoln. If you have run amuck of her I advise you to get out quickly before she has you under arrest.”⁵ Affectionately named Mother Bickerdyke by the enlisted men, she earned the respect of both these Union generals and was the only woman that Sherman allowed in his advanced base hospitals.⁶

Mary Livermore recounted a story that exemplified her ingenuity, boldness and devotion to the soldiers.

The last day of the year 1863 was one of memorable coldness, as were the first few days of the year 1864. The rigor of the weather in Chicago at that time actually suspended all outdoor business, and laid an embargo on travel in the streets. It was even severer weather in Mother Bickerdyke’s location; for the icy winds swept down Lookout Mountain where they were re-enforced by currents of air that tore through the valleys of Mission Ridge, creating a furious arctic hurricane that overturned the hospital tents in which the most badly wounded men were located. It hurled the partially recovered patients out into the pouring rain, that became glare-ice as it touched the earth, breaking anew their healing bones, and chilling their attenuated frames with the piercing mountain gales. ... Night set in

intensely cold, for which the badly fitted up hospitals were wholly unprepared.

All that night Mother Bickerdyke worked like a Titan to save her bloodless, feeble patients.

There were several hundred in hospital tents—all wounded men—all bad cases. The fires were piled higher and higher with logs, new fires were kindled which came nearly to the tents, until they were surrounded by a cordon of immense pyres, that roared and crackled in the stinging atmosphere. But before midnight the fuel gave out. ...The surgeon in charge said, "we must try and pull through until morning for nothing can be done to-night." And he retired to his own quarters, in a helpless mood of mind.

Mother Bickerdyke was equal to the emergency. With her usual disdain of red tape, she appealed to the Pioneer Corps to take their mules, axes, hooks, and chains, and tear down the breastworks near them, made of logs with earth thrown up against them. They were of no value, having served their purpose during the campaign.... There was no officer of sufficiently high rank present to dare give this order; but, after she had refreshed the shivering men with a cup or two of panado, composed of hot water, sugar, crackers, and whiskey, they went to work at her suggestion, without orders from officers. They knew, as did she, that on the continuance of the huge fires through the night, depended the lives of hundreds of their wounded comrades; for there was no bedding for the tents, only a blanket or two for each wounded suffering man.

The men of the corps set to work tearing down the breastworks, and hauling the logs to the fierce fires, while Mother Bickerdyke ordered half a dozen barrels of meal to be broken open, and mixed with warm water, for their mules. Immense caldrons of hot drinks were renewedly made under her direction—hot coffee, panado, and other nourishing potables; and layers of hot bricks were put around every wounded and sick man of the entire fifteen hundred as he lay in his cot. From tent to tent she ran all night in the icy gale, hot bricks in one hand, and hot drinks in the other, cheering, warming, and encouraging the poor shivering fellows.

Suddenly there was a great cry of horror; and looking in the direction whence it proceeded, she saw thirteen ambulances filled with wounded men, who had been started for her hospital from Ringgold, in the morning, by order of the authorities. ...On opening the ambulances, what a spectacle met Mother Bickerdyke's eyes! They were filled with wounded men nearly chilled to death. ...the men, who were past complaining, almost past suffering, were dropping into the sleep that ends in death. The surgeons of the hospital were all at work through the night with Mrs. Bickerdyke, and came promptly to the relief of these poor men, hardly one

of whom escaped amputation of frozen limbs from that night's fearful ride.

As the night was breaking into the cold gray day, the officer in command of the post was informed of Mother Bickerdyke's unauthorized exploits. ... He took in the situation immediately, and evidently saw the necessity and wisdom of the course she had pursued. But it was his business to preserve order and maintain discipline; and so he made a show of arresting the irregular proceeding. ...Not until day-dawn, when they could go safely into the woods to cut fuel, were the men disposed to abate their raid on the breastworks.

"Madam, consider yourself under arrest!" was the Major's address to ubiquitous Mother Bickerdyke.

To which she replied, as she flew past him with hot bricks and hot drinks, "All right, Major! I'm arrested! Only don't meddle with me till the weather moderates; for my men will freeze to death, if you do!"

A story got in circulation that she was put in the guardhouse by the Major; but this was not true.

The men for whom she labored so indefatigably could mention her name only with tears and benedictions. And those in camp manifested their approval of her by hailing her with three times three deafening hurrahs whenever she appeared among them, until, annoyed, she begged them "for Heaven's sake to stop their nonsense, and shut up!"⁷

Mother Bickerdyke continued to serve "her boys" after the war. She arranged for the free rail transportation of fifty veteran families from Chicago to Salina, Kansas, to claim homesteads. She appealed to her old friend, General Sherman, now commandant of Fort Riley to condemn army wagons and horses to help the homesteaders get started. Not finished yet, General Sherman sent a letter of recommendation to railroad officials to build a hotel in Salina and appoint Mrs. Bickerdyke the manager. The Salina Dining Hall, better known as Bickerdyke House, became a charitable institution for the over 250 veterans and their families that settled in the area over the next two years. She continued to help the families in Kansas even when she moved to New York and later San Francisco, helping others in need.⁸

Mrs. Bickerdyke returned to Kansas when she was in her eighties where she founded the Bickerdyke Home for war nurses, veterans and their widows and orphans. It kept in continuous operation until 1951.⁹ Few women were more beloved and respected than Mrs. Bickerdyke was. An officer once said Mother Bickerdyke meant more to the “army than the Madonna to Catholics,” and a colleague wrote, “She talks bad grammar, jaws at us all ... and is not afraid of anybody ... but Lord, how she works!”¹⁰



Mary Ann Bickerdyke

Figure 11.



Clara Barton

Figure 12.

Clara Barton. Before the Sanitary Commission or Christian Commission could get organized, Clara Barton was had forced her way through the red tape and military restrictions to get to the front.¹¹ Born on Christmas Day, 1821, Clara acquired her experience in nursing at an early age when she cared for an invalid brother as a child. At 15 she became a teacher and later worked as a copy clerk in the US Patent Office in Washington, D.C. from 1854-1861.¹² Her work for the government was unique at the time for there were few women employed by the Government, particularly with a salary

equal to that of a man, but Miss Barton was well qualified for the work by her fine, copperplate handwriting.¹³ But it wasn't until she was 40 years old and the Civil War broke out that she was truly launched into what became her life's work.¹⁴ She became one-woman soldiers' aid society, gathering medicines and supplies and turning up on several battlefields or at field hospitals to comfort the wounded and goad careless or indifferent surgeons.¹⁵

After the Union defeat at the 1st Battle of Bull Run in July 1861, she advertised in the publication *Worcester Spy* for donations of provisions for the wounded and received so many contributions that she initially set herself up as a distributing agency.¹⁶ But she wanted to do more for the men who were suffering in battle.

Clara was a forward thinker in her day, advocating the treatment of soldiers as near the battlefield as possible. The common practice was to transport the wounded soldiers and treat them far from the battlefield. Knowing that nurses were urgently needed at the battlefield and that women could do the job just like Florence Nightingale, she "broke the shackles and went into the field" by convincing the U.S. Surgeon General William Hammond to let her go.¹⁷ From mid-July 1862 to the spring of 1863, Barton operated as a freelance front-line nurse, distributing comforts and tending the sick and wounded of the Army of the Potomac.¹⁸

Her first experience on the front was caring for soldiers on the battlefield of Slaughter Mountain. Margaret Leech wrote an account of this experience in her book, *Reveille in Washington*:

That night, in the mist and darkness, Miss Barton, with a little band of helpers, prepared to feed the crowd. She had almost no utensils but she had many boxes of preserves; and as jam jars and jelly tumblers were emptied, she filled them again and again with soup or coffee or bread

soaked in wine. Monday brought many wounded who had lain three days without food. To insure that none should be loaded on the cars without receiving nourishment, Clara Barton personally fed that day's arrivals in the wagons, climbing from wheel to brake. By evening, her supplies were almost gone. As the wounded still came in, she stirred the leftovers together; and, in the pouring rain, amid the uproar of the thunder and the artillery at Chantilly, the famished men greedily ate a concoction of hard crackers pounded into crumbs and mixed with wine, whiskey, brown sugar and water.¹⁹

Clara learned many valuable lessons and was better prepared the second time:

An army wagon, drawn by a string of frisky mules, was assigned to her by the Quartermaster's Department. Her own baggage was contained in a handkerchief, but the wagon bulged with stores. She had even had the forethought to bring lanterns, so that the surgeons could see to work at night.²⁰

She was calm and resourceful, always turning up with food and medical supplies just when they were needed most. On September 13, 1862, Clara learned that the supplies she was carrying to Harpers Ferry were desperately needed so she drove through the night, arriving at daybreak to help the wounded. President Lincoln was so impressed that he honored her with an invitation to review the troops with him.²¹

At Cedar Mountain, Second Bull Run, Fairfax Court House, Fredricksburg, Antietam and the Wilderness she assisted the surgeons in stitching up wounds and in bloody amputations.²² Clara related her experience at Antietam would always be remembered for it was the first time she removed a bullet and saw a wounded soldier shot in her arms as she gave him water.

Clara left the Army of the Potomac in the spring of 1863 and traveled to Hilton Head, South Carolina. After the siege of Charleston failed, Clara, who was ill, returned home in the North to retire from active life for a while.²³ During her recuperation, Clara Barton's friendship took advantage of her friendship with influential congressmen help bring political pressure to bear for reforms in army medicine.²⁴ She also sent letters to

government officials, philanthropists and civic organizations because there were no organized welfare program at the time.²⁵

When she had recovered her strength, Clara went back to the front, this time to the Wilderness Campaign near the Rapidan River. The situation there was grim—wounded men were severely burned in a brush fire and nonstop rains made it impossible for wagons to transport the wounded out. Clara took charge:

Collecting four fast horses, she rode nonstop to the dock. There she boarded a steamer for Washington where she met with Senator Henry Wilson, then chairman of the Senate military committee. Clara Barton concisely related to him the condition of the wounded and implored him to help. She was so convincing and so earnest that early the next morning the quartermaster general and his staff rushed help to the battlefield. Barton spent two days getting supplies ready, and by the third day she was back on the scene of action.²⁶

In 1864 she served as superintendent of nurses for the Army of the James, her only official connection during the war. Working under General Butler, Clara relied on her judgment and allowed her to proceed without orders from superiors, an honor never conferred on a woman.²⁷ In spite of her relative autonomy, she had difficulty taking orders and preferred to work on her own.²⁸

Clara Barton gained national acclaim as “the angel of the battlefield,” but she was also “everybody’s old maid aunt,” fussing over the men she called “my boys.” After the war she continued to serve her boys by coordinating a national effort to locate soldiers who were missing in action.²⁹ When discussing her experiences after the war she told audiences that “if her work in battle appeared to be rough and unseemly for a woman, they should remember that fighting was equally rough and unseemly for men.”³⁰

Later, Clara worked under the auspices of the International Red Cross in Europe to distribute relief to the French in the Franco-Prussian War. When she returned to the

United States, she campaigned for the establishment of an American Red Cross. She headed the agency for 23 years after its incorporation in 1881. A poor manager, unwilling to delegate and more unwilling to share authority, Clara, then 83, was pressured to resign in June 1904.³¹ She died in April 12, 1912, at 91 years old.

Doctors

There is little written about the role of female physicians during the Civil War because there were so few. There was virtually no opportunity for women to get the training required for a degree and their male colleagues did not accept even those that did earn one.

Elizabeth Blackwell, M.D. A pioneer spirit, Elizabeth Blackwell was never willing to accept status quo. She braved all criticism and rejection to be the first woman awarded a medical degree in 1849. When she had difficulty establishing her practice, she founded the New York Infirmary for Women in 1857³²

At the fall of Fort Sumter, Miss Blackwell met with the lady managers of her infirmary to discuss the care of soldiers. Subsequently, on April 29, 1861, she organized a meeting of three thousand women at the Cooper Institute in New York. Several prominent men were also in attendance of what became the formation of the Women's Central Association for Relief (WCAR) to coordinate the work of numerous smaller associations. The WCAR was the precursor in the establishment of the U.S. Sanitary Commission in June.³³

During the war, Miss Blackwell and her sister selected and trained nurses, with Elizabeth as chairman of the registration committee of the WCAR.³⁴ After the war, they founded the New York Medical College for Women to train women physicians before

returning to England to expand medical opportunities for women as they had done in the United States.³⁵

Mary Elizabeth Walker, M.D. Another pioneer in the medical field, Mary was one of only a few woman, Union or Confederate, to hold a surgeon's position during the Civil War.³⁶

Mary, born in 1832, graduated from Syracuse Medical Hospital College in 1835. She first served in the Civil War as a nurse in the Patent Office Hospital while pursuing an application for a commission in the Union Army.³⁷ In addition to nursing in a hospital, Dr. Walker nursed at nearby camps and organized the relief society for needy women visitors. It took three years from her initial application to receive a commission as a contract surgeon in 1864.³⁸ She served first as an assistant surgeon in the Army of the Cumberland.³⁹

In addition to her medical duties, Mary also participated in some espionage for which she was subsequently captured. A Confederate captain wrote to his wife that he and his fellow soldiers "were all amused and disgusted ... at the sight of a *thing* that nothing but the debased and depraved Yankee nation could produce." He also noted that "she was dressed in the full uniform of a Federal Surgeon ... not good looking and of course had tongue enough for a regiment of men." Mary was imprisoned in Richmond for four months before an exchange was made with a Confederate surgeon.⁴⁰

Dr. Walker was appointed to several other positions including superintendent of the Female Military Prison in Louisville before her discharge in June 1865.⁴¹ Shortly afterward, President Johnson presented her the Congressional Medal of Honor, the first and only woman to receive such an honor, for "bravery under fire at Gettysburg and a

number of other battlefields by saving the lives of hundreds of Union soldiers.”⁴² The citation reads:

Whereas it appears from official records that Dr. Mary E. Walker, a graduate of medicine, “has rendered valuable service to the Government and her efforts have been earnest and untiring in a variety of ways,” and that she was assigned to duty and served as an assistant surgeon in charge of female prisoners at Louisville, Ky., upon the recommendation of Major Generals Sherman and Thomas, and faithfully served as contract surgeon in the service of the United States, and has devoted herself with much patriotic zeal to the sick and wounded soldiers, both in the field and hospitals, to the detriment of her own health, and has also endured hardships as a prisoner of war four months in a Southern prison while acting as contract surgeon; and Whereas by reason of her not being a commissioned officer in the military service, a brevet or honorary rank cannot, under existing laws, be conferred upon her; and Whereas in the opinion of the President an honorable recognition of her services and sufferings should be made: It is ordered, That a testimonial thereof shall be made and given to the said Dr. Mary E. Walker, and that the usual medal of honor for meritorious services be given her.⁴³

The Army withdrew the medal in 1917. Several reasons have been passed on over time explaining the decision. There was one claim there was no record of its award. Some believe it was in retribution for her involvement in the suffrage movement. And a third stated reason is the military’s effort to “... increase the prestige of the grant” resulted in the rescission of 900 awards.⁴⁴ However, Dr. Walker continued to wear the medal until her death in 1919.⁴⁵ Fifty-eight years later, the United States Congress posthumously reinstated her medal. President Carter officially restored it on June 10, 1977.⁴⁶



Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell

Figure 11.



Dr. Mary Walker

Figure 12.

Administrators of the Wounded

Dorothea Dix. Although Miss Dix was not in the line of fire, it was her efforts in administering care for the soldiers as the Superintendent of Female Nurses that made her invaluable to the Union.

Her appointment as the superintendent of women nurses was a result of her seemingly tireless work for insane asylum reform. A successful teacher who established her own school in Boston, was forced to give it up when a tubercular illness, a recurring affliction, struck her. It was after a period of invalidism that she dedicated herself to the quiet study of conditions of insane asylums, prisons and almshouses in many states, Canada, Japan and Europe. In Massachusetts she spent a year touring every jail, whorehouse and house of correction. She then presented a report, or “memorial” to the Legislature asking for funds for an institution specially designed to treat the mentally ill. Always observing the rules of feminine propriety, she rarely spoke publicly, but she was

a persuasive lobbyist behind the scene. She did the same in state after state as well as other countries.⁴⁷ Her revelations concerning the conditions and treatment of the insane not only brought about reforms and influenced legislation, but it also enlarged the social consciousness of the nation.⁴⁸

As the superintendent of nurses, Miss Dix oversaw the recruitment, training and placement of some 2,000 women whom cared for Union soldiers. Described as an assertive individualist with limited administrative skills and duties that were ill defined, she worked in uneasy cooperation with the Sanitary Commission to recruit nurses and controversy swirled around her.⁴⁹ Concerned for keeping her appointees above reproach, she issued very strict stipulations for her nurses:

No woman under thirty years need apply to serve in government hospitals. All nurses are required to be very plain looking women. Their dresses must be brown or black, with no bows, no curls, no jewelry and no hoop skirts. ... [Nurses] must be in their own rooms at taps or nine o'clock unless obliged to be with the sick; must not go to any place of amusement in the evening; must not walk out with any patient or officer in their own room except on business; must be willing to take the forty cents per day that is allowed by the government.⁵⁰

She even requested that the provost marshal, who had been receiving a number of aspiring applicants, to send her only those who were able to turn a full-grown man around in bed, and to do the most menial work. This, he remarked, thinned out the number of applicants considerably.⁵¹

Margaret Leech described the difficulties Miss Dix had a difficult time getting organized and working with others:

In her long career of public service, she had always worked alone, and she had no administrative ability. She was elderly [nearly sixty], high-strung and inflexible. In a determination to do everything herself, she was soon involved in a maze of details. She interviewed all candidates, assigned them to their posts, visited hospitals, adjusted disputes, and ferreted out abuses. ... Under the pressure of her multifarious and unsystematized

duties, she grew overwrought, lost her self-control and involved herself in quarrels. In these she often was right; but she never showed the graces of tolerance and tact.⁵²

Miss Dix remained at her post without leave throughout the war, but the Federal nurses never were organized. Many of the doctors snubbed her and with the support of the Surgeon General, hired their own attendants. This led to some nurses reporting to Miss Dix and others to the surgeons. Training was further complicated by nurses sent directly by State agencies and aid societies in addition to wives and sisters who remained with their loved ones to care for the men. Without formal training or discipline, they had to learn the best they could.⁵³

The nurses often were afraid or awed by her in the beginning, but in time most came to respect her and many were sincerely devoted. Most doctors resented her but it isn't clear if it was because she was dictatorial or because she was more efficient than many of them.⁵⁴

After the war Miss Dix returned to her work for the insane, continuing to travel widely in Europe and Japan. Hardworking, dedicated to the humanitarian cause in spite of continuing illness, she could seem cold and distant; "I have no particular love for my species," she once said, "but own to a exhaustless fund of compassion."⁵⁵ Miss Dix died in 1887 in one of the hospitals she herself had founded.

Sally Louisa Tompkins. With the Confederacy slow to work out a coordinated system of medical care for its wounded, people like Sally Tompkins were a Godsend. She was one of the first Southern women to support a hospital by renting a mansion in Richmond and turning it into a twenty-two-bed infirmary.⁵⁶ When the medical service got organized, Confederate President Jefferson Davis ordered all private hospitals be closed. To allow an exception in Sally's case, President Davis granted her a captain's

commission in the Confederate Army. She was the only woman to receive such a commission.⁵⁷

Mary Chesnut mentioned visiting the soldiers at “Sallie’s” hospital on several occasions in 1861 in her diary. She even wrote a vignette about her and a nurse:

Miss Sally Tompkins laughed at Mrs. Carter—whose face is so strikingly handsome the wounded men could not help looking at her, and one was not so bad off but he burst into flowery compliment. Mrs. Carter turned scarlet with surprise and indignation. Miss Sallie Tompkins said, “If you could only leave your beauty at the door and bring in your goodness and faculty.”⁵⁸

Miss Tompkins financed and operated her hospital until June 1865. Only 73 of her 1,000 patients died, the lowest rate of any hospital during the war.⁵⁹



Dorothea Dix

Figure 13.



Sally Tompkins

Figure 14.

Notes

¹ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 484-485.

² McPherson, 484.

Notes

³ John P. Dever and Maria C. Dever, *Women and the Military*. (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1995), 147 and McPherson, 483.

⁴ Marilyn Mayer Culpepper, *Trials and Triumphs: Women of the American Civil War*. (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 1991), 348.

⁵ Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Women in the Civil War*. (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 49.

⁶ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 483.

⁷ B. A. Botkin, ed., *A Civil War Treasury of Tales, Legends and Folklore*. (New York: Random House, 1960), 379-382.

⁸ Massey, 300-302.

⁹ Massey, 303.

¹⁰ Massey, 49.

¹¹ Margaret Leech, *Reveille in Washington, 1860-1965*. (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1945), 218.

¹² Bruce Catton, *The Civil War*. (New York: American Heritage Publishing Company, 1985), 324.

¹³ Leech, 218.

¹⁴ "Clara Barton," *BIOGRAPHY Online*, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 23 December 1998, available from http://search.biography.com/print_record.pl?id=12594.

¹⁵ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 483

¹⁶ "Clara Barton," *BIOGRAPHY Online* and Leech 218.

¹⁷ John P. Dever and Maria C. Dever, *Women and the Military*. (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1995), 27.

¹⁸ "Clara Barton," *The National Women's Hall of Fame*, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 23 December 1998, available from <http://www.greatwomen.org/barton.htm>.

¹⁹ Leech, 219.

²⁰ Leech, 219.

²¹ Dever & Dever, 27.

²² "Clara Barton," *The National Women's Hall of Fame*.

²³ Dever & Dever, 28.

²⁴ McPherson, 483.

²⁵ Dever & Dever, 28.

²⁶ Dever & Dever, 28.

²⁷ Dever & Dever, 28.

²⁸ "Clara Barton," *BIOGRAPHY Online*.

²⁹ "Clara Barton," *The National Women's Hall of Fame*.

³⁰ Massey, 51.

³¹ "Clara Barton," *BIOGRAPHY Online*.

³² "Elizabeth Blackwell," *The National Women's Hall of Fame*, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 23 December 1998, available from <http://www.greatwomen.org/blkwele.htm>; Dever & Dever, 147; McPherson, 480 and Massey, 10.

³³ Dever & Dever, 147 and McPherson, 480.

Notes

- ³⁴ Dever & Dever, 147.
- ³⁵ Massy, 352 and “Elizabeth Blackwell,” *The National Women’s Hall of Fame*.
- ³⁶ John P. Dever and Maria C. Dever, *Women and the Military*. (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1995), 143 and Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Women in the Civil War*. (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 62.
- ³⁷ Dever & Dever, 143.
- ³⁸ Massey, 62.
- ³⁹ Dever & Dever, 143.
- ⁴⁰ Massey, 62-63.
- ⁴¹ Massey, 63.
- ⁴² David E. Jones, *Women Warriors: A History*. (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 1997), 238.
- ⁴³ Barbara A. Wilson, “Dr. Mary Edwards Walker – Surgeon, Spy, Suffragette,” *Women’s Information Internet Network*, on-line, Internet, 13 February 1999, available from <http://www.undeleterg.org/mil3walker.html>, 1-2.
- ⁴⁴ Dever & Dever, 143 and Wilson, 1.
- ⁴⁵ Dever & Dever, 143.
- ⁴⁶ Wilson, 1.
- ⁴⁷ “Dorothea Dix,” *The National Women’s Hall of Fame*, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 23 December 1998, available from <http://www.greatwomen.org/dix.htm>.
- ⁴⁸ Margaret Leech, *Reveille in Washington, 1860-1965*. (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1945), 209-210.
- ⁴⁹ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 483.
- ⁵⁰ Marilyn Mayer Culpepper, *Trials and Triumphs: Women of the American Civil War*. (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 1991), 323.
- ⁵¹ Leech, 210.
- ⁵² Leech, 210-211.
- ⁵³ Leech, 211.
- ⁵⁴ Massey, 47.
- ⁵⁵ “Dorothea Lynde Dix,” *BIOGRAPHY Online*, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 23 December 1998 http://search.biography.com/print_record.pl?id=14270.
- ⁵⁶ Massey, 47-48.
- ⁵⁷ Dever & Dever, 141-142.
- ⁵⁸ Mary Boykin Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), 149.
- ⁵⁹ Dever & Dever, 142.

Chapter 5

Life Goes On

Among the madams in their carriages and the painted girls on horseback, went haughty Mrs. Greenhow, and gay Belle Boyd, and Mrs. Lincoln, with madness in her eyes. Living and dead, the wind of time had blown them all from Washington. In the streets were only tired people, wandering home through dust and manure and trampled garland.

—Margaret Leech
Reveille in Washington, 1860-1865

The end of the war was a time to heal the wounds of the country and build a stronger nation. The women of the North and the South had played many roles during the war and the women written about are only a shadow of the contributions by so many. But for all the independence and opportunity for women in those four years, what happened afterward? Clara Barton, in a Memorial Day address in 1888, said, “woman was at least fifty years in advance of the normal position which continued peace ...would have assigned her.”¹ Were these advances bestowed on women freely and if they were, what advances can be attributed to the war? Also, what problems did women face after the Civil War ended? And what effect did these changes have on women in the future? These are all questions that need answers to understand the true benefits of the war for the advancement of women.

Women had various expectations after the war’s end. Some women looked forward to returning to life as it was before the war: the men would be the breadwinners and the

women would take care of their home and family. Others wanted to take advantage of their new skills and independence. The reality was a difficult transition for all of them.

Mary Massey wrote:

The end of the war found many women in all parts of the country destitute, despairing and embittered. They had presumed conditions would be vastly improved after four years of bloodshed, and while there were hopeful signs on the horizon, they were distant. People could later look back and see that during the war much had been done by and for women, but those who were hungry, confused and in mourning could not recognize their gains. To talk to these women about the stronger nation welded together by the conflict would have been useless. Those who made great sacrifices and received nothing but problems in return took a pessimistic view, some for only a brief time and others for the rest of their lives.²

The return to normalcy proved elusive for many women whose returning husbands struggled to deal with their physical and mental handicaps. Women were often forced to continue as the managers and directors of family farms and businesses.³

Life was particularly difficult for many wealthy Southern women, like Mary Chesnut, who had lived on plantations with slaves doing all the work. Things were much different for many of them, such as the plight of Grace Elmore's neighbor after the Union occupation of Columbia, South Carolina. She wrote in her diary:

The poor old lady literally descended in one night from great wealth to abject poverty, she whose recreation it had been to clothe the naked and feed the hungry, is now absolutely without clothing and bread except what others give her, and she is sheltered by a shanty knocked up in a few hours from planks picked out of the ruins.⁴

Mary Chesnut once the "center of political and social activity in Richmond during the war, lived out her latter years burdened with debt, her home in Camden, South Carolina, ransacked and the fields burned."⁵ She explained:

There are two classes of vociferous sufferers in this community: (1) those who say, "If people would pay me what they owe me!" (2) "If people

would only let me alone. I cannot pay them. I could stand it if I had anything to pay debts.”

Now we belong to both classes. Heavens! What people owe us and will not or cannot pay would settle all our debts ten times over and leave us in easy circumstances for life. But they will not pay. How can they?⁶

While many women in the South were trying to rebuild their shattered lives, Northern women, with or without the husbands, migrated West when jobs and or husbands couldn't be found. The story of Mrs. Bickerdyke's homesteaders in Kansas is one example. Another is Asa Mercer's colonizing effort in the Northwest. He advertised for unattached women of good character and on January 16, 1866, forty-seven ladies sailed to San Francisco aboard the *Continental*. Most of the "Mercer girls" married and any one wanting a job found them.⁷

Taboos against women working outside the home relaxed as a result of their wartime accomplishments. Many war widows and wives of disabled veterans had little choice but to work to support themselves and their families rather than depend on the charity of family and friends.⁸ In the South, Marjorie Mendenhall, described a transition in the eighties and nineties from planter families to merchant-farmers. This shifted the population to towns where "ideas circulated more freely and where women had greater opportunities for employment, group activities and leadership."⁹

Women in the North had different adjustments to make. As soldiers returned home, they often faced long periods of unemployment, leading to their wives and children either supporting them or relying on charity. Another problem for women was job displacement. Women who needed jobs faced greater competition from men after the war and to make matters worse, employers were under pressure to hire veterans. This

often left destitute wives of the handicapped and many of the four million widows and orphans in desperate need.¹⁰

In spite of the contributions of women during the war, many of the same male biases resurfaced. Many conservatives still did not approve of women working outside the home. Mary Massey described how the industrial revolution wasn't meant for the women according to men:

After the invention of the typewriter, there were men who maintained stenography could never be a field for women because it required so much concentration and physical endurance that it “would break a young woman down in a short time.” More than twenty years after the invention of the sewing machine it was declared too dangerous for women to operate; and a Boston physician testified that in a survey among sixty-nine of his medical colleagues, forty-four stated woman's physical structure did not permit her to sew by machine without permanently damaging her health.¹¹

In spite of some setbacks, much of women's postwar progress can be attributed to increased employment opportunities. Women in greater numbers worked because of ambitions for advancement and recognition. “The economic emancipation of women was the most important single factor in her social, intellectual, and political advancement,” wrote Massey, “and the war did more in four years to change her economic status than had been accomplished in any preceding generation.”¹²

By 1875, the number of women working in government jobs had doubled. Federal, state, and local agencies, business firms and institutions were employing women clerks, bookkeepers, stenographers and receptionists. Competition for civil service jobs was great because wages were higher and workdays shorter than most other occupations. And many women found government work a chance to “lose” themselves in Washington and earn a living away from tragic memories.¹³

Women's involvement in ladies' aid societies also helped make post-war volunteer work for hospitals, veterans' rehabilitation centers, temperance societies and orphanages an admirable service.¹⁴

The quest for more knowledge grew as women sought higher education. More colleges opened their doors to women and more women attended college.¹⁵ There was a virtual education revolution for women between 1865 and 1890. Several women's colleges were founded during this period: Vassar, Smith, Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, Barnard, Radcliffe, Goucher, Sophie Newcomb and Agnes Scott. Coeducational universities were Cornell, Michigan, Wisconsin, Kansas, Missouri, California, Texas and Kentucky. To meet the need for teacher training and vocational courses, institutions such as the George Peabody Normal School in Nashville opened.¹⁶

The medical profession was still slow to accept women as equal contributors. Ridiculed, ignored and harassed by surgeons, many nurses returned home feeling unappreciated and with no future in their chosen profession. In fact, it took an organization of Civil War nurses and the Women's Relief Corps to pressure Congress to approve pensions for these women in 1892.¹⁷

In spite of the obstacles, educational opportunities for women in medicine increased. By the mid-1880's there were twenty-two schools for nurses in the nation and a number of medical colleges. In addition to the Blackwells' New York Medical College, the Woman's Medical College of Chicago was founded in 1870. In 1871, the University of Michigan's Medical School admitted women although they took their courses separate from men. By the 1890's Syracuse, California, Iowa and Howard Universities were among the dozen coeducational medical colleges. Civil War nurses, such as Mary

Safford, Belle Reynolds and Nancy Hill, completed their medical studies to become physicians. Dr. Safford was one of the foremost women surgeons in the country and is credited with being the first women to perform an ovariectomy.¹⁸

Women became more vocal after the war, advocating temperance and women's suffrage. Annie Wittenmyer, Laura Haviland and Mary Livermore were among the war workers who supported the temperance movement. Susan B. Anthony is well known for her efforts in promoting suffrage, as did Ms. Livermore.¹⁹

For all the advancements made by women as a result of the Civil War, a role for women in the military was not one of them. While there were women on the battlefield, they were not considered soldiers. And those women who fought as soldiers did so under disguise. More extensive pre-enlistment physical examinations would eliminate this recurrence in the future.

The prejudices that precluded women from military service remained for many years afterward and many still remain today. They include:

1. Females do not have sufficient upper-body strength
2. Females do not have the aggressive tendencies necessary for warfare
3. Female presence would disrupt the male bonding necessary to cement the fighting force²⁰

Of course, men of the nineteenth century also believed women couldn't physically handle a typewriter or sewing machine. General Philip Sheridan recalled a complaint by Colonel Conrad of the 15th Missouri about two women, one a teamster in the division wagon train and the other a private cavalry soldier attached to the headquarters for escort duty. He claimed the women had become an "annoyance" and contributed to "demoralizing his men" by getting drunk.²¹

For all the concerns of women's ability to fight, women like Sarah Edmonds, Jennie Hodgers, Elizabeth Walker and Kady Brownell proved otherwise. These women and many others served with distinction and led the way for American women of the future to serve their country.

Notes

¹ Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Women in the Civil War*. (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 339.

² Massey, 337-338.

³ Marilyn Mayer Culpepper, *Trials and Triumphs: Women of the American Civil War*. (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 1991), 376.

⁴ Culpepper, 376-377.

⁵ Culpepper, 381.

⁶ Mary Boykin Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), 830.

⁷ Massey, 298-299.

⁸ Culpepper, 391.

⁹ Massey, 327.

¹⁰ Massey, 328.

¹¹ Massey, 334.

¹² Massey, 340.

¹³ Massey, 340-341.

¹⁴ Culpepper, 392.

¹⁵ Culpepper, 392 and Massey, 349-350.

¹⁶ Massey, 349.

¹⁷ Massey, 351.

¹⁸ Massey, 352-353.

¹⁹ Massey, 355-356.

²⁰ David E. Jones, *Women Warriors: A History*. (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1997), 250.

²¹ Richard Hall, *Patriots in Disguise: Women Warriors of the Civil War*. (New York: Paragon House, 1993), 155.

Chapter 6

Conclusions

We are women of a breed whose racial ideal was no Helen of Troy, passed passively from male hand to male hand.... We are of a race of women that of old knew no fear, and feared no death, and lived great lives and hoped great hopes; and if today some of us have fallen on evil and degenerate times, there moves in us yet the throb of the old blood.

—Olive Schreiner

The Civil War forced women of the mid-19th century to take action, whether it was working the farm or in a factory to support the family left behind when their husband or father went to war or joining ladies' aid societies. Other women followed their loved ones to war as *vivandieres* or nurses. Still others were the patriots, longing for adventure and independence, as saboteurs, spies and even soldiers. Regardless of the role a woman chose they were pioneers of their age, for prior to the Civil War the traditional role for women was dedicated to their home and family.

Thus the Civil War was like a revolution for women in that:

the Civil War provided a springboard from which they [women] leaped beyond the circumscribed "woman's sphere" into that heretofore reserved for men. While the country was slow to express its appreciation to the feminine "veterans" of this war, the nation entered another conflict in 1917 confident that its women were much better equipped to do their part than their ancestors had been in 1861.¹

Their actions led to more opportunities not available to most women before the war, such as careers and education. These opportunities did not come easy or quick. Some of

the same prejudices concerning women's roles and abilities were challenged but they persevered to earn their right to make a choice.

Abraham Lincoln came to realize the sacrifices and contributions of American women during the Civil War with these words:

I am not accustomed to use the language of eulogy. I have never studied the art of paying compliments to women. But I must say that, if all that has been said by orators and poets since the creation of the world in praise of women was applied to the women of America, it would not do them justice for their conduct during this war. I will close by saying, God bless the women of America.²

Notes

¹ Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Women in the Civil War*. (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 367.

² Marilyn Mayer Culpepper, *Trials and Triumphs: Women of the American Civil War*. (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 1991), 393.

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